

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ORIGIN OF SISAL FARMING IN MAKUENI, KENYA 1965-2018

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Abstract

According to ADRA, the global sisal production declined by 50% in the year 2018, this is the largest decline recorded since the inception of the crop, therefore this justifies the researcher's choice of the period between 1965-2018. The purpose of this study was to document the origin, of sisal farming in Makueni, Kenya between 1965 - 2018. The objectives of the study aim at examining the origin of sisal farming in Makueni. The significance of this study is that the study will add knowledge to the sisal farmers which in turn will earn foreign exchange through exportation this research used few theories for instance theory of historical inquiry which gives a detailed explanation on the history of sisal farming in Makueni, Kenya 1965-2018..

Keywords: *Sisal farming, Origin*

INTRODUCTION

This Paper examines the origin of sisal farming in the post-colonial period (1965-2018), transforming of sisal farming sector during the Kenyatta era (1965-1978), and reforms in sisal industry during Moi regime 1978-2002. This was necessary because it formed the baseline information of the study. Once settled in their current area, they engaged in agricultural activities within their environmental setup and land tenure system. The section also examined adoption of cash crops and how the colonial regime interfered with it up to 1963. Growth of sisal farming in Makueni (1965-1980) In Kenya, the pioneer years of colonialism were vital to ensuring that European farmers, the colonial government as well as their allies in commercial circles in London had power over both the productive resources and the economic structures. Sisal was one of the significant crops that had been reserved exclusively for European production (Brett, 1973). The European settlers grew the crop in selected parts of the Kenya highlands upon realizing its potential. During these early years, Africans were excluded from growing the crop (Brett,1973).

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was deployed because this gave a valuable insight and in depth understanding of sisal farming in Makueni. The focus was on recording history on sisal farming during the stated period.

Findings

A law had been enacted that barred Africans from engaging in sisal production. The 1910 Sisal Plantations and Sisal Dealers Ordinance empowered District Commissioners to issue

Certificates which permitted holders to grow sisal (<https://learning.uobi.ac.ke/.../331-t-the-p...>) (exe-E-learning portal). This law prevented Africans from growing sisal. Issuances of certificates to African began later in 1950 (<https://learning.uobi.ac.ke/.../331-t-the-p...>) (exe-E-learning portal): (Brett, 1973).

Furthermore, this ordinance was reinforced by other excuses one of these was African sisal would be prone to diseases which would spread to European farms (Musembi, 2010:91). The first African sisal grower did not produce quality sisal. This outcome enhanced the sanctioning of Africans from sisal growing (Thurston, 1987). The significant position of the white farmers in the Legislative Council also served as mechanism to promote their economic interest, the colonial government did not give attention to African agriculture (Musembi, 2010:95). Musembi, (2010:95) further observed that the settler production, in the early twentieth century did not have specific policies on African agriculture, the colonial state was more inclined to settler production. The Department of Agriculture for instance, financed the settler sisal growing while excluding Africans. These arguments explain the reasons for the delay in sisal farming among Africans in Makueni County and other parts of Kenya.

Kenya's sisal industry at its early years was shaped by colonial economic policies within and without Kenya (Barnes, 1959:3). In Kenya, the European settlers were in charge agricultural production for export market. This was enabled by favorable policies on land, tax and labour that had been enacted at the set off of colonial rule. Policies were enacted in order to make the protectorate self-sustaining (Sorenson, 1968:30). The prosperity of the protectorate depended largely on agricultural commodities given, that there were few mineral deposits known to exist at this time (Barnes, 1959:3); (Ouma, 1988).

Mr. Charles Eliot, Second Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate during the initial years influenced the agricultural export production. His report on the local inhabitants pointed them as unreliable in production of crops for export. For instance he described the Maasai society, „utterly non-productive and the Kikuyu as, as badly disorganized“ among other descriptions (Wolf, 1974:47). The description of the Kamba by the settlers portrait them as lazy respondents whose major activity was roaming in market places (Ngok, O. I., 23/7/2017). He further emphasized that, there were vast lands favorable for European agriculture. Therefore, the settlers could engage in crop production whose transportation via the Kenya-Uganda railway would be possible. The transportation of raw material to the coast was also guaranteed as well as the importation of manufactured goods from overseas to the interior (Wolf, 1974:47). These sentiments served to reinstate the settler economic interest in the colony.

Kenya-Uganda railway was constructed to link the Coast and Lake Victoria. The railway reached the terminus of Kisumu in 1901. The railway led to the expansion of the foreign office's administration to the interior (Brett, 1970:2). It also formed a vital basis for agricultural development for the country (Dilley: 66:15); (Bates,1989).

The means to generate revenue, as well as the agents and method of development became a challenge at beginning colonialism (Kosgey,1981). A range of proposals for settlement were put forward. These advancements ranged from the options of Indians immigrants who had settled long the railway line, the European settlement, the Jewish colonization scheme as well as the African producers (Ghai and McAuslan,1970). The British industrialist opted for European settlers in 1901 as agents of development in place of the Jews and Asians and after a thorough discussion (Dilley, 1966:15); (Bennett, 1963:12). The settler estate as a means of production was selected after consideration of specific combination of political, economic,

Geographical and political factors (Kosgey,1981). The promotion of white settlement was accompanied by specific legal policies and repercussions. The colonial government was charged with the responsibility giving land to the settlers on attractive packages. This entailed the provision of labour for land cultivation, regulation of African scheduled areas of settlements among other issues (Ghai and McAuslan,1970).

Among some of the legislations that the colonial government supported the settlers indirectly are as follows. First it is important to note that these legislations provided an avenue for settlers to maximize agricultural production and as result establish estate. The 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance permitted white settlers to own land on freehold or 999, or 99 years. Second was, the 1908 Land Title Act. This law allowed the separation between privately owned lands and the

Crown Land. All community lands became Crown Land and the white highlands which were European settled lands were privately owned (learning.uond.ac.ke); (Zwanenberg, 1975); (Dilley, 1966:252). It is believed that by 1963, 18 percent of Kenyans best land had been alienated for use by between 1,000 to 35,000 Europeans (Zwanenberg, 1975). Africans entitlement to land was given little attention by the colonial masters (Barnes, 1956:11). They were stripped privileges to their own land. As a result, no significant move was initiated to provide land to be used by the natives till later in 1915 when the Crown Land Ordinance enabled the governor to declare reserves (Barnes, 1956:12). Little efforts were made to ensure the proclamation until in 1926. This was done to facilitate for European land utility (Barnes, 1956:12); (Zezeza, 1973).

The settler agriculture was as well favored by the tax system. Taxation levied on exports was reduced to enable the settler farmers' exports more profitable (Zwanenberg et al, 1975). The government offered several agricultural services to white settlers while excluding Africans

(Zwanenberg et al, 1975). Services offered included, transport, communication networks and training among others. It is important to note that Africans contributed to these services through taxation (Zwanenberg et al, 1975:20-40). Moreover, during the initial years of white settlement, the colonial government encouraged and supported both official and unofficial research on commodities that were likely to yield abundant returns on capital invested in the protectorate (Masfield, 1962); (Wolff, 1974:68-73). This was also applied on the sisal crop. Furthermore, the colonial government granted loans to certain crop producers as well as subsidized rates on railway transport and on loans on particular producers (Barnes, 1956:11).

On the side of Africans, a sharp contrast was evident in terms of policy framework. Up to the early 1920s the colonial policy towards Africans was overlooked. This is what Wrigley, Kenya referred to as "a conscious neglect". This arose from belief that the enhancement of the Africans areas was likely to interfere with the flow of labourers and consequently increase the wages (Wrigley, 1959:226). European purported that the development of African agriculture was likely to interfere with European production. Indeed in the period 1912-1913 the native produce was estimated to have been seventy percent of the value of agricultural export and by 1928 this proportion had dropped drastically to less than twenty percent (Wrigley, 1959:226). Despite this isolation, projects arose in African areas whose efforts relied on individual initiatives or that of mission societies. Occasional advisory visits were offered by the agricultural departments which were largely driven by official requests from agricultural officials (Moris, unpublished manuscript:20).

Notable policy shift toward Africans began during the post-war recession period. This resulted from the financial crisis that emerged from drop in revenue, exports trade. Some folks argued for the need to stimulate African production with the hope of easing balance of payment

by increasing the exports and reducing commodities imported at the same time boosting revenue (Brett, 1925:115-138). Furthermore, the annual report for the Department of Agriculture for the period 1920-1921 revealed the plans to promote African agriculture. This involved the training of African instructors who would in return aid in improvement of farming activities in the African reserves. Native production of crops for export such as millet, maize, groundnuts, cotton, simsim peas and peas were enhanced for native export (Department of Agriculture, Annual Report (1920-1921). A policy of stimulating native industries production was presented in 1923 by the District Commissioner for Makueni. The natives were to be issued freely with seeds of suitable crops which would add to mitigation for the collection of a tax. The natives of Lumbwa were expected to get little from this. However no agricultural officer was sent to the district (KNA.DC/KER/1/3).

Other efforts originated from the British business population such as the British East African Corporation major known as Sir E. H. M. Legget who argued for the shift in the economy of the colony noting that the future of most countries depended largely on the promotion of native production as opposed to white production (Brett, 1925:178). Other initiatives were driven by W. Ormsby-Gore of the East African Commission who focused on strategies to stimulate native economic advancement (Ibid: 46-47). This began in 1925 with a target of improving social conditions. The commission emphasized on the need to promote both European interest as well as those of the natives hence supporting the dual policy of development. This involved the combination of both native production and non-native production (Ibid). By 1929 the Department of Agriculture had been obliged to have a clearly defined policy in African areas and official policy changes were articulated (Moris, unpublished work). Protection of the settlers was not only at the production levels but also at the market

levels (Ibid). For instance within the estate movement, the first estate ordinance was passed in 1931. This ordinance however did not allow Africans to form estates. It was later in 1945, when a fresh ordinance was formulated and passed that permitted Africans to form estates (Bager, 1980:21). This restrictive policy was largely because of concerns among the Europeans that African estates could reinforce the economic position of Africans, which in turn would result to complexity for Europeans in getting adequate number of workers for their farms.

Moreover, economic position of this kind would be a political forum for the Africans in their agitation against racist colonial system. It was in mid 1950s that the development of African estates took a steady pace. This was as result of the government initiative (Bager, 1980:21). The Swynnerton Plan of 1954 which mobilized for an increase in commodity production on African small-scale farmers further intensified pyrethrum and sisal cultivation. New marketing avenues hence had to be established and therefore the marketing estates were used as a means to bridge the gap. The political environment at this period served to intensify the rise and rapid growth of African marketing estates (Bager, 1980:21).

Furthermore, the change of policy towards African estates by the colonial government and the mobilization of the African small-scale peasants were in light of the increased political tensions. Therefore it was a colonial government

initiative aimed at creating a political buffer. For Africans, estates at this period served as a means to avoid non-African businessmen. These then explain the rapid increase in the number of the African estates in 1963 and after independence.

Conclusion

In a summary, it is evident that the European settlers via the favorable policy framework gained power over the economy until the official policy shift in 1920s. European access and security over land is believed to have promoted the increase of sisal acreage. Labour and tax policies on the other hand availed the avenues for cheap workforce supply on settler farms. Colonial farmers' agitation to bar the progression of native settlements was driven by the desire to maintain the upper stake in the economy. However, with decline in Kenya's economic position following the World War One, policy shift towards African development arose however the settlers still maintained their position, controlling the base of African economic progress (Barnes, 1956:19); (Gikenye, 2010).

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